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ABSTRACT

This case study, one of four, is part of a larger study, "Ethnographic Case Studies of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) of At-Risk Students in Middle School Classrooms." The study provides relevant case literature regarding CRP for the enhancement of preservice teacher education and describes the characteristics of a multicultural classroom in "Little Nato," a transitional, urban area, where the teacher, Katherine, practices the philosophy, theory, development, and application of holistic education and CRP. CRP is defined as the incorporation of diverse content and approaches into the process of teaching while attending to the cultural norms that affect learning. Ethnographic methodology was utilized to collect data through classroom observation and through interviews with Katherine and her students. Findings suggest that Katherine created a successful atmosphere of learning by fostering a positive, creative learning environment and by implementing instructional content and modalities relevant to her students, thus facilitating their personal growth as well as their academic achievement. (LL)

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"Katherine With-a-K and Little Nato"

A Case Study of Culturally Responsible Pedagogy

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Abstract

Katherine's case study was one of four developed as part of a larger study to provide relevant case literature regarding culturally responsible pedagogy for the enhancement of pre-service teacher education.

Practicing an ethical classroom management style, Katherine created a successful atmosphere of learning by fostering a positive, creative learning environment and implementing instructional content and modalities that were relevant to her students, thus facilitating their personal growth as well as academic achievement.

"KATHERINE WITH-A-K AND LITTLE NATO"

A CASE STUDY OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIBLE PEDAGOGY

Introduction

Katherine's case study is one of four investigated as part of a larger study, Ethnographic Case Studies of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of At-Risk Students in Middle School Classrooms, conducted in the spring of 1991 through The Wichita State University. The goal of the study was to describe the characteristics of a classroom where the teacher practices "culturally responsible pedagogy" (CRP), developing case literature which illustrated applications of CRP in the language arts curricula.

NCATE mandates requiring Multicultural Education in teacher training present teacher educators with the challenge of not only defining multicultural education, but implementing instruction that is relevant to the classroom. This case is developed from a perspective that views multicultural education as a process, and includes in its framework socioeconomic diversity as well as culture, language, ethnicity, race, gender, exceptionality, and religion. Culturally responsible pedagogy is defined as incorporating diverse content and approaches into the process of teaching while attending to the cultural norms that effect learning.

The theoretical basis for this case draws on the holistic philosophy of education. Miller (1990) describes the holistic paradigm as a "fertile, imaginative, and highly diverse worldview

which draws upon serious scholarship, authentic mystical traditions, radical politics, and above all, a genuine search for personal wholeness and a culture that would truly nurture human potentials" (p.58). Human potential is nurtured through avenues of the mind, emotion, creativity, imagination, compassion, and a sense of wonder and reverence, lending validity to these components as vital aspects of human existence.

To fully understand the implications of holistic education as it relates to culturally responsible pedagogy it is helpful to consider two levels of the theory, development, and application of holistic education:

(1) On the macro level, holistic education can best be described as ecological, spiritual, and global. It is ecological in that it seeks to "achieve a greater balance between individuality and community, creativity and tradition, intuition and reason, inner peace and objective success" (Miller, 1990, p. 59). It is spiritual, recognizing that the inner human qualities are vital aspects of human existence. It is global in that it transcends cultural prejudices and is universal in its scope and application.

(2) On the micro level, holistic education requires that teachers attend to the physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of the student, facilitating the student's development as it unfolds naturally. Teachers who seek to "involve" their students in their educational process as well as their social surroundings empower students in their social world, enabling

them to function in a democratic society. It is significant to note that holistic education is broad in its foundation and range. Culturally responsible pedagogy encompasses the macro level as well as the micro.

How might we better understand the qualities that a successful teacher of culturally diverse students brings to the classroom? Although examples of holistic education have existed for hundreds of years (Miller,1990), the identification of the characteristics of culturally responsible pedagogy is in the infant stages of development. Yet significant implications can be found in primary source material.

> "Through culturally sensitive instruction that reflects the teachers knowledge of his students' culture, concerns, and needs the students gain confidence in the ability to learn, to solve problems, to set goals, and to reverse the stereotypes which hinder their achievements" (Abi-Nader,1990, p.15).

First & Chrichlow (1988) cite the importance of demonstrating emotional engagement with the students daily as a perquisite for learning as well as allowing students the freedom to discuss their ideas and thoughts. Kucer (1989) discusses sociocultural authenticity found lacking in whole language curriculum, and points to the need for real world context. Contextualized and individualized instruction are significant avenues of

facilitation in seeking to teach the diverse learner (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988).

This case study seeks to empower pre-service teachers by providing a snapshot of the micro level of holistic education: one-on-one, teacher to student. Holistic educators argue that challenging academic learning must be accompanied by an experience that attends to the emotional and psychological needs, allowing for the natural unfolding of the abilities of the child. Miller (1990) asserts that more learning actually takes place with less effort expended when these conditions are met. The result is not only achievement, but a much welcomed joy in the process of learning.

"Little Nato"

"Little Nato" is located in what might be described as a transitional area of the city. On the way to my first observation I noted that the housing appeared to decrease in value the closer I went to the school. The classroom is a no-frills beige portable unit, one of nine placed in double rows along side the main school building. A few blocks from the school is a boarded up set of apartment buildings. The homes near by are modest in value and size. Although the first impression might be one of drabness, as you enter the contrast of the interior is a shock to the senses. Sunlight filtering through a wall of windows casts a pleasant glow that is reflected off the plants within the room. Desks are temporarily clustered in groups of three or four, interspersed with the greenery and

aquariums, bird cages, and bookshelves. An area approximately one-fourth of the room size is carpeted and furnished with a rocking chair and plush throw pillows. Inhabitants of the room are diverse and often entertaining: "Baby" often flies about the room when she is not perched on the teacher's shoulder, "Ginger" breaks any threat of silence with a myriad of mating calls, and "Sylvester" and "Sebastian" are always available to comfort and console the remaining human population. Although the latter two are deemed lowly in stature by most of us, the white/black and white rats are definitely the most sought after and loved by the students. Drop-ins are always welcome, as everyone seems to know that snakes and land crabs and fish of various sort fit right into this creative, educational atmosphere.

The only time you will find the room silent is during sustained silent reading period. During class time the sounds of the birds mingle with the layers of conversation which seem endless. Students interact with the teacher and one another and the environment from the moment they arrive, which is often before school starts. To the casual observer the room might appear as cluttered and noisy; however, looking deeper one finds a method to the madness that works quite well with this group of 28 energetic and diverse young people.

In this setting sixth grade students learn of language arts and social studies. The carpeted area is the "rain forest" and is used randomly by students whenever they feel the need to

stretch out. It is also utilized by small groups whenever more individualized instruction is called for.

The creator of this unlikely place of learning is a 47 year old African-American female who is known to me best as "Katherine -with-a-K." The name was chosen because of its ancestral significance accompanied by an explanation grounded in historical and racial pride.

Coming from a family of professional educators, Katherine has taught for 27 years in elementary and adult education. My first encounter with her was unusual, in that she wore clothes of a by-gone era, a bandanna tied around her head, and as we spoke for the first time, began to peel an unsightly scar from her face. She had just returned from one of her many performances of Harriet Tubman, which she delights in sharing with other schools, churches and community organizations. Upon entering the empty room, she began to visit immediately with me while she carried on simultaneous conversation with the many classroom pets to which she was tending.

The Methods

Applying ethnographic methodology, case study data was collected through on-sight observation, non-participant and participant. Off-sight observation included an out-of-state field trip to the Kirkpatrick Omniplex in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interviews were conducted formally with Katherine and informally with students in the classroom as situations arose. Team teaching planning sessions were also observed during formal

class planning periods and during the travel time to Oklahoma. Observations were audio taped and,later, sessions of classroom interaction were video taped for purposes of triangulation.

Data analysis was done in a natural set of stages, using a combination of selective sampling of data and comparative analysis of repeat occurrences of verbal and non-verbal interaction. These were counted and grouped after several periods of observations and the results led to formal and informal interviews with the participants to validate the preliminary findings. During the second stage of data analysis, detailed counts were made of occurrences from audio tapes, video tapes, and transcriptions of observations. Triangulation and analysis with other members of the research team resulted in to categories, themes, and sub-groups of data which were then focused on during the final phases of observation.

The last phase of data collection focused on site interviews with 10 of the students. These were a "selected sampling" and it was the feeling of the teacher that I had a balanced representation of the class. Information gathered was then compared to the preliminary findings and teacher interviews to determine the relationship between the etic and the emic perspectives.

The Findings

"In general, we have atomized our universe so that we can control it. Yet today, we are

> reeling under the effects of atomization."
> (Miller, 1988, p.10)

Findings from this case can be broadly categorized into two areas: a positive, creative learning environment and variety in method and content of instruction. It is important to note that these are not isolated areas, indeed they are symbiotic in their relationship. While Katherine's rich classroom environment supplies an atmosphere that the students find unique, it also lends itself to the transfer of learning. When asked about the "jungle" that makes up a portion of the room, the students responded favorably:

> *"That's really neat because the Amazon, we learn about that in Geography, and she points out some stuff that's in the Amazon that we have in our room." (John) [StIntv.10]
>
> *"Its nice, because um, it like just helps us breath naturally." (Joey) [StIntv.11]

One of the many aspects to creating a positive learning environment is the positive manner in which Katherine regards her students.

<u>The Holistic Building of Self-Esteem</u>

As I entered the room on the first day and began to set up, I made quick note of a simple conversation between two boys of African-American heritage that would exemplify one the major

findings from the case, Katherine's polite and positive manner in which she communicates with her students:

S1 "Did Ms. K tell you to vacuum the floor?"

S2 (while vacuuming the Amazon)"No! She asked me."

The tone of voice and the young man's response indicated the difference that he felt between being asked to do something and being told to do it. I observed many times as students initiated the vacuuming of the carpet or feeding and watering of the animals. Their sense of pride was apparent in the contributions that they made, which might otherwise have been thwarted by a less sensitive and more demanding teacher. Katherine almost always never tells, but phrases each request in a polite manner, even when she is correcting students. Phrases such as Excuse me, Excuse yourselves, I appreciate that, Thank-you and Please are heard repeatedly through-out the day. During interview #2, I inquired about the "politeness":

K "I believe that teachers have to set an example for their students, and our students have enough negative feedback in their lives that they need something positive...I see myself as an ambassador for teachers, and ambassador for education, and I just want to be positive with the kids."

J "Why do you think this is important in the classroom?"

K "To develop self-esteem in order for kids to succeed. To me, self-esteem and feeling good about yourself is the key to success."

Two factors are generally significant in regard to self-esteem and education. A strong bond exists between the student and competent caretakers which aids in development of skills and confidence, and it is these social skills and confidence which enable a child to take advantage of educational opportunities (Comer, 1988). In the absence of positive, nurturing caretakers, the responsibility of fostering healthy emotional development may be left to the teacher. Secondly, sociocultural misalignment may also occur between home and school, and it becomes the teachers responsibility to bridge the cultural gap by understanding the home culture of the students. While striving to maintain her positive outlook, Katherine is well aware of the sociocultural misalignment that can occur between home and school:

*"Some of the kids who have serious home problems might be the most unique (laughs)...as far as personalities are concerned because they have so many pent up feelings, and they get them off their chests when they come to school." [Int.3]

*"Then there are kids who perhaps didn't get any rest. They got home and mom and dad were

> drinkin' and fussin' and fightin', and they had to leave everything and go a seek shelter somewhere. That's a reason. That's not an excuse. And I would make allowances for that....or move around from house to house for two weeks at a time just to keep momma's boyfriend from finding them."[Int.3]

Katherine seeks to understand the lives of her children so that she will be responsive to their needs at the point of their needs.

> "[The most introverted] are the kids who have been called dumb...Kids who come from families ...have problems...They don't know how to confront these problems. I even wonder [if] some of these kids have been abused sexually or physically. I have one little girl, and the only way she will talk is if I call on her...to read.
>
> ...A child like that is very easy to slip through the cracks because she never gives you any gray hairs. I make certain that I always call on her, to make her know that is a part of this classroom..."[Int. 3]

The introverted nature of the child, for whatever reasons, do not diminish the needs of the child for a sense of belonging.

Katherine also seeks to teach students necessary social skills that will empower the student with their own sense of self worth and enable them to effectively stand up for themselves.

Empowerment

Empowerment begins with learning to ask. It is quite common for students to spend the night at Katherine's home, but first they must ask both Katherine and their parents:

> *"So, if they are bold enough to ask me, fine. (Laughs) ...That's also to let them know...always ask. If there is something that you want, ask. It's no sweat off your back if the person says 'no'; it's no sweat off your back if they say 'yes'. But just think, if you did ask, if that person said 'yes' how much more the richer you will be, and it doesn't hurt...it doesn't hurt cost anything to ask anybody anything."[Int.2]
>
> *"If you didn't agree with the teacher's grade--the grade that's been assigned to you, I would surely suggest that you go to the teacher, and nicely say to them, "What happened?" [Ask] why you were given that grade. If you disagree, and you think it is not your grade, you might want to go and speak up for yourself." [Obv.1A]
>
> *"And I've told some of my students, so what if someone is prejudiced, that is their

hang-up, that is their fault, don't let them mess you up. You go for the gold, soar as high as the eagles soar. Don't let anyone hold you down honey, don't even let me hold you down."[Int.4]

Development of the Whole Child

"Another damaging segmentation in education is the way we separate the head and heart." (Miller, 1988,p.10)

Responses to the question, "Does Ms. "K" consider you as a student or as a person" were revealing in regards to her concern for the development of the whole child:

*"Person. She just wants you to be yourself, believe. That you can be yourself, that's what she always she wanna do." (Tina) [StIntv.4]

*"Both. Because she wants me to get good grades, and she's interested in psychological problems."

What do you mean by psychological problems?

"Well, if you having problems at home and its making a difference." (Richard) [StIntv.5]

*"As a person. She doesn't look to you as a student, she looks to you as a person. If you were a student, she'd give you homework and

just tell you to do it, but she's just, she explains everything and if you don't understand she'll take time out of the classroom. Like, the other teachers just tell you to do the assignment and tell you what you're supposed to do, they don't explain it." (John) [StIntv.10]

*"She's a very caring teacher. She likes teaching and she says that if we don't learn she's going to keep trying-she won't give up-she wants us to learn and do our very best." (Stephanie) [StIntv.2]

*"I feel better because I know that I can start over. I can start a new day."

What do you mean by you can start a new day?

"Because, she's my second hour teacher, and its like yesterday or whenever I've done something wrong...and she kinda got mad at me. I know that the next day when I come in it will be like starting off new again." (Micheal) [StIntv.8]

*"Cause she's nice and she's helped me do a lot and she's showed me, she's showed both my mom and I that we can do things if we want. Since my parents got separated she's really helped me out a lot." (Kristie) [StIntv.9]

*"The most outgoing kids are those that...I just let develop into being themselves, they're just...spontaneous." [Int.3]

Another facet to Katherine's holistic approach to the building of self esteem overlaps into the area of instruction. Katherine values student input by providing the opportunity to talk, question, discuss and share opinions:

"I told the kids at the very beginning of the school year that I wanted the classroom to be a place where they could feel safe to do or say anything with in reason and not feel afraid of being reprimanded or being embarrassed." [Int.3]

A Spacesuit Built for Two

Discussions in the classroom are most often student centered and free flowing. Students have shared opinions on men having babies as well as discussion of the practicality of having sex on the moon, all without a blink from Katherine. Although she doesn't seek to curb the students thoughts, often she will direct them towards possible entrepreneurial solutions:

S1 "You could do it anywhere. If you wanted to do it on the moon, you could do it on the moon."

K "Do you think that you would have to have on a space suit?"

Ss (in unison) No. No. That would be horrible.

K "That would be a little tricky, wouldn't it?"

S1 "In a space suit for two."

S2 "You could."

K "Would you consider a space suit built for two? Would you consider that?"

Ss (in unison) No. Heck no!

K "Who knows...from this conversation someone may decide to go home and try sketching a space suit built for two. They have a bicycle built for two, so why not a space suit built for two?" [Obv. 1A]

In this brief vignette Katherine's demonstrates her understanding of the need of her students to participate in a free exchange of ideas as a perquisite for learning. Katherine feels that there are no questions that students might ask that are inappropriate for the classroom:

> "Even in language arts, we'll discuss sex, especially when they come from science or human sexuality...And they still have a lot of questions they want to ask...we'll get it out in the open. And nothin' is sacred!"[Int.4]

Discussion

Diverse needs in education will best be met when teachers go a step beyond accommodating uniqueness in students to assuming a responsibility for teaching the whole child (Huber, Pewewardy & Parscal).

Students and teachers are "products" of their culture--it is the framework in which they meet. Katherine assumes a responsibility for her students that goes beyond the traditional student-teacher role. By informing herself of the culture of the child and building upon the child's frame of reference in instruction content and modality, Katherine facilitates the learning process. Involved at the age of 17 in civil rights issues, Katherine's empowering of her people is brought to life anew within the classroom as she seeks to empower her students. By structuring a positive, creative learning environment, Katherine facilitates the natural curiosity and quest for knowledge that her students bring to the classroom. Attending to the intellectual, emotional, and physical needs of the child, Katherine successfully reflects a pedagogy that is indeed culturally responsible.

Implications

Students' innate curiosity can be used as a vehicle for learning when the teacher creates an atmosphere which attends to the cultural diversity unique to each student. While providing a positive role model for all students Katherine epitomizes an aspect of global relations that transcends any one culture. By treating all of her students with dignity and respect and

maintaining that expectation from her students, Katherine models a global harmony that is conducive to a interdependent multicultural society. Garcia (1991) describes this system of classroom management as "an ethical system of classroom management that transcends all cultural differences and operates on norms that are fair to all students." (p.8) In Katherine's case the application of "ethical transcendence" resulted in a high degree of cross-racial, cross-ethnic, and cross-socioeconomic interaction within the classroom.

Katherine draws on basic tenets of the holistic paradigm of education, as evidenced in her espoused and operational curriculum. Although she is supported by her administration, it would appear that barriers to a truly holistic paradigm are implicit in the traditional model of public schools (Huber, 1991). The general theme of an holistic approach to the child have much to offer teachers who are seeking to create a culturally responsible pedagogy.

Katherine's case, in concert with other similar cases, add to the existing body of knowledge that identifies and clarifies the characteristics that teachers need in order to meet the needs of the diverse student populations.

* All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality of participants.

"Katherine-with-a-K"

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